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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7613
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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR WILLIAMS/WATERS/BELGRADE;
NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/LOGERFO; TREASURY FOR NUGENT/ADKINS;
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: FOEME CALLS FOR WORLD BANK TO CONSIDER JORDAN
RIVER MANAGEMENT TO SOLVE DEAD SEA'S DECLINE

REF: 2006 AMMAN 8959

¶11. (SBU) On May 10, regional NGO Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) held a conference in Jerusalem on the proposed Red Sea - Dead Sea Conduit (RDC) and the organization's recently-completed socioeconomic and environmental impact study, which was fully-funded by USAID's Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) program. The Consul General made opening remarks at the conference, expressing USG support for collective efforts to find viable solutions to the region's water management issues. The Consul General said that in order to restore the Dead Sea, the parties will need to consider various solutions, including new sources of water, conservation, and enhanced resource management.

MERC-Funded Study Conveys Caution On RDC

¶12. (SBU) The RDC's stated purpose is to arrest the meter-per-year drop in the level of the Dead Sea caused by lowered inflows to the Dead Sea as surface and groundwater sources are diverted for agricultural, industrial, and domestic consumption. The MERC program funded a three-year study through FoEME concerning the environmental and socioeconomic impact of a RDC. In 2004, USAID provided funding for FoEME, the Palestinian Water and Environment Development Organization (WEDO), the Jordanian Royal Scientific Society, and the Geological Survey of Israel to research the environmental and socioeconomic impact of the RDC. The project produced a public opinion survey and four scientific-research reports that raised concerns about the construction of the RDC, including (1) threats to the chemical and physical properties of the Dead Sea's water from the introduction of seawater; (2) possible stratification of the Dead Sea's water (thus changing its physical and chemical properties); (3) potential saltwater leakage from the RDC into the Arava Valley's freshwater alluvial aquifer system; and (4) probable damage to the marine habitat in the Gulf of Aqaba/Eilat from the construction of a RDC intake station and alteration of water circulation patterns in the Gulf.

FoEME Calls For Focus On Jordan River Water Mis-Management

¶13. (SBU) FoEME's Israel Director Gidon Bromberg stated during the conference that FoEME supports the World Bank-led feasibility study of the RDC but stressed that alternative solutions should also be studied. He said that the World Bank-led study seeks to address the declining levels of the Dead Sea without addressing the root cause of the decline,

which Bromberg described as mis-management of water resources along the Jordan River. He called for the Bank to add a side letter to the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the RDC feasibility study which would include analysis of the Jordan River alternative solution to the decline of the Dead Sea. The "Jordan River alternative" calls for an independent study of the Jordan River and regional water management policies and what could be done to restore the natural flow of the river. (Note: In May 2005, the PA, Israel, and Jordan agreed to a World Bank-led feasibility study of the proposed RDC. The World Bank study is scheduled to begin in the fall. The USG has pledged USD 1.5 million towards the total cost of the two-year, USD 15.5 million World Bank study. End note.)

¶4. (SBU) Faris Hadad-Zervos, Deputy Director of the West Bank/Gaza World Bank Mission, was in attendance and responded to Bromberg's request that the Bank amend the TOR.

Hadad-Zervos stressed that the Bank was merely acting as a vehicle to conduct the feasibility study to which the three parties had agreed, and that it was the responsibility of the PA, Jordan, and Israel to agree on additional language for the TOR. Bromberg voiced his displeasure with Hadad-Zervos' response, describing it as "falsely innocent," noting that the Bank had previously used its influence to successfully convince Jordan and Israel to include the PA in RDC feasibility study discussions and the signing of the TOR in ¶2005.

WALLES